

James H. Lane Ranch (Riverwood Ranch)
One mile south of Richfield and Highway 26
Richfield
Lincoln County
Idaho

HABS
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JAMES H. LANE RANCH (Riverwood Ranch)**

HABS No. ID-113

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32-RICHE,
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Location: The farmstead and barn are located 1 mile south of Richfield and Highway 26; approximately 35 miles northeast of Shoshone, Lincoln County's seat.

U.S.G.S. Richfield 7.5' Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 11/732000/4769260

Present Owner: United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Shoshone District Office.

Present Occupants: Unoccupied

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Riverwood Ranch is significant under Criteria A, because of its associations with broad patterns of south-central Idaho agricultural history and settlement. It is also significant under Criteria C. The ranch's barn represents the use of basalt as a building material in south-central Idaho during the early twentieth century.

NARRATIVE TEXT

The arid Snake River plain stretches across southern Idaho for nearly three hundred miles. The James Lane property is located in the middle of the plain surrounded by an ancient basalt flow. The ranch complex lies near the north banks of the Little Wood River, one mile directly south of the small town of Richfield (originally called Alberta). The elevation of the site is approximately 4300 feet. Rainfall is minimal and the gray desert landscape has discouraged many prospective homeseekers over the years. Some early farmers settled along the Snake and its tributaries, the Big Wood and Little Wood Rivers, and used their waters to grow a few crops and raise livestock. By the late 1890s a small town, known as Alberta, had sprung up on the banks of the Little Wood River to serve the local settlers. The town was named after the daughter of one of the earliest settlers, William Strunk, who owned land several miles north of town.

Like most of the arid West, extensive settlement was dependent upon the availability of water. The Carey Act of 1894 provided for reclamation of federal lands. Under its provisions, each arid state or territory could select up to 1,000,000 acres of federal land and make contracts with individuals or companies to provide irrigation water. The companies received water rights to the land and then contracted with prospective settlers. The land could be sold in parcels as small as 40 acres and as large as 160 acres. If a settler irrigated at least 40 acres, he (or sometimes she) could obtain a patent on the land. The construction company sold water rights to the individual farmer, and the state sold the land for 50 cents an acre, with half the money down and the remainder paid when final proof was made. When the irrigation system was completed, the contract between the state and the construction company stipulated that the water share owners would operate the system.

Real estate investors from in and out of state speculated on new irrigated communities in Southern Idaho. Alberta was one of those communities. By 1904, fairly successful development on Carey Act Lands south of the Middle Snake River spurred further speculation on the canyon's north side. In 1907 the Idaho Irrigation Company was formed by a group of New York businessmen. S.D. Boone, a real estate man in Hailey, acted as the company's local manager and agent. The Idaho Irrigation Company lands were located in Lincoln and Gooding counties. That year the company opened 40,000 acres of its land surrounding Alberta to settlement. A setback occurred when the financial panic of 1907 forced the company to restructure. In 1908, under the new management of J.G. White and Company of New York, the Idaho Irrigation Company transferred its stock to new buyers and elected new directors, including Fred W. Gooding of Shoshone and C.B. Hurtt. The infusion of money created sufficient funds to construct the irrigation canals and ditches. The land surrounding Alberta, now rechristened Richfield, was opened to settlement.

Within a year Richfield had a population of approximately 500 and the town consisted of several substantial commercial buildings and homes. Structures included a railroad depot, hotel (which compared favorably, according to early visitors, to those found in cities like New York and San Francisco), a bank and hardware store. A commercial club made up of local businessmen advertised Richfield's promising future by promotional advertising in Eastern and Midwestern states.

The Idaho Irrigation Company planned to divert water from the Big Wood and Little Wood Rivers to a reservoir near the Big Wood River. This reservoir was supposed to supply sufficient water to

all project lands. In 1910 Magic Dam was completed. Following the dam's completion, southern Idaho suffered a reversal in its rainfall patterns and suffered severely from drought. Water was especially scarce in the Richfield area, and farmers soon discovered that Magic Reservoir could not provide sufficient water to cultivate dry lands. Water users promptly filed suit against the Idaho Irrigation Company. In 1920 a lower court decision decreed that the Idaho Irrigation Company had obligated itself under the Carey Act to furnish more water than it had available. The case went to the Supreme Court in 1924, and the 1920 decision was upheld. The promise of more water than could be delivered was not an uncommon one made by irrigation companies on Carey Act lands. Settlers often struggled for many years waiting for the water to come--and often it never arrived.

As part of their early promotional efforts, Southern Idaho irrigation companies not only invested in land for livestock and crop raising, but also provided support for other agricultural developments. For example, the Idaho Irrigation Company implemented a "Cow Fund Loan" to start large-scale dairying on their lands in Lincoln and Gooding counties. The funds apportioned to each tract were handled by local associations, which gave the company the proper guarantees of secure repayment. After contracts were made for placing the cows, the cows were bought and shipped in. The number of cows allotted to each individual was based on the applicant's ability to care for them: ability was judged by experience in dairying and farming, amount of acreage in cultivation, and stable accommodations.

The Idaho Irrigation Company's promotional efforts made the future of Richfield look promising. Many people, both in and out of state, took advantage of these opportunities. Jennie Lane and James H. Lane exemplify this pattern of settlement. Jennie Lane of New York acquired homesteaded land in the Richfield area and claimed water rights as early 1908, though she never lived there. Her son, James H. Lane, was a livestock grower with interests near Boise, Hailey and Richfield. His large sheep flocks grazed on lands throughout south-central Idaho. In 1913 James Lane teamed up with J. R. McIntosh and opened a dairy on the property his mother owned. They advertised their Wood River Dairy stock's high quality, calling them "Wisconsin Cream Cows" in the Richfield newspaper. By the spring of 1913 Lane and McIntosh bought the route and property of a competitor's dairy and consolidated it with their own. Eventually Lane was deeded half of his mother's property south of Richfield. He had a house built and moved to the Richfield area in 1914.

Between 1914 and 1918 James Lane had a large barn erected. He followed local patterns and had the barn constructed out of native basalt, a rock found in abundant supply in Richfield and the surrounding area. Substantial basalt buildings already existed in Shoshone area, a nearby railroad town, and in the Jerome area. Few trees were located nearby, and in the early years shipping costs made ready-cut lumber an expensive proposition. Basalt was a plentiful and inexpensive building material available locally. Stone buildings also presented an image of prosperity and stability in newly formed western communities. The railroad brought numerous stone masons to Shoshone, and they became skilled at using lava rock as a building material. The basalt commercial and agricultural buildings already existing in Shoshone and near Jerome served as examples for incoming settlers. The builder of Lane's barn is unknown, but is attributed to two masons, Sandy Reed and Jack Oughton, who were known to have been in the Richfield area during the 1910s. The barn itself was a symbol of agricultural prosperity and stability. The use of basalt quoins and concrete trim gave the barn the appearance of being an important "business building" of the community. All other outbuildings and fences were constructed of wood.

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Although Richfield-area residents struggled with a limited water supply, the years before and during World War I were fairly prosperous for farmers and livestock growers throughout southern Idaho. The demand for agricultural products during World War I rose greatly, as did prices for those products. Idaho farmers, cattle men, and sheep men benefitted from the war effort. Anticipating continued prosperity, many farmers put their profits into more land, and machinery. They often borrowed large sums of money to cover these purchases. Livestock men did the same, building up their herds of cattle and sheep. Thus they created a surplus which drove down the price per pound. The end of World War I and subsequent market changes brought an agricultural depression to Idaho and other western states that would last through the end of the Great Depression.

Unfortunately for James H. Lane, he followed an aggressive pattern of investment during the war years. He also continued to divide his time between Boise and his Richfield interests. By the 1920s, Lane was involved in several lawsuits for nonpayment of bills, including irrigation and land taxes, and on loans used to buy more livestock. Eventually he and his mother lost most of their lands near Richfield, including the barn and surrounding property. Lane's own mother also filed suit against him, trying to recoup some of her own losses. By 1927, James Lane had moved back to Boise. He continued to winter his sheep near Richfield during the 1930s, and died sometime in the 1940s. His lands were owned by banks and the State of Idaho, and rented by various farmers over the years. By 1980, the land was again in private ownership. Terry and Deanna Seidler renamed the property the "Riverwood Ranch," and operated it for several years. Sometime between 1980 and 1984, the original Lane house burned down and the barn's interior was radically altered. Fences, corrals, and some outbuildings were rebuilt or torn down. In December 1984, the property again went into receivership under the auspices of the Farm Home Administration. It was then transferred to the Department of Interior, specifically the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Shoshone District. Other changes are on hold until the BLM develops a management plan for the property.

The history of Richfield and the James H. Lane Ranch exemplify the high expectations that irrigation created and the subsequent realities of agricultural life on semi-arid lands. James H. Lane's Richfield experience was one of initial success followed by great losses--a story all too common on many of Idaho's Carey Act lands.

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PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken under the auspices of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Shoshone District, upon the recommendation of the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (ISHPO) and the National Park Service's Western Regional Office. The BLM is in the process of acquiring the Riverwood Ranch and extant buildings, including a lava rock barn that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Considerable structural damage was done to the barn when a previous owner removed large portions of the barn loft area. Richfield city officials were concerned that the barn created a potential safety hazard. The BLM wished further information in order to make a decision whether to stabilize the rock walls or dismantle the building. The ISHPO and the National Park Service requested a level of HABS (Historic American Building Survey) documentation on the site and barn, which has been provided in the enclosed reports.

HABS project personnel were chosen in June and documentation occurred in August 1995. Project personnel were members of the Arrowrock Group, a historical research firm in Boise, Idaho. Madeline Buckendorf has worked over fifteen years in historic preservation and written many successful National Register nominations. Barbara Perry Bauer also has extensive experience in cultural resource work. She has completed several intensive-level survey projects and HABS/HAER documentations. Both consultants are qualified under 36 CFR 61, Appendix A, and have collaborated on several historic preservation projects over the past five years.

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